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DECLINE OF THE FOURTH ESTATE

By Walter Trohan

For many years the American press corps gloried in the term Fourth Estate. There was a solemn pride that although members of the press ranked behind the political rulers, the clergy and the commons, they constituted the honor guard of liberty. Politicians, even when personal relations were of the friendliest, were regarded as the natural enemies of freedom. Members of the press stood ever ready to tear down politicians from the high places they too frequently erected for themselves by greed, corruption and hypocrisy. At all times the press was prepared to do battle against abridgment of its own freedom in the secure conviction that any such limitation could only lead to the loss of national liberty.

Of late years, especially in Washington where a thousand newspapermen ply their trade, there is mounting suspicion that members of the press have begun to grow weary of the exacting watchdog role and have been attaching themselves to the First Estate, the ruling class. The more kindly observers of this phenomenon believe reporters (in their zeal to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable) have been swept into cross currents of politics beyond their depth. Less kindly and more acid observers, of whom Mr. Truman is one, believe newspapermen are confusing the First Estate with the first profession. "Most newspapermen are whores", the President observed sententiously to a former colleague in the Senate.

Certainly, it would seem true that many newspapermen feel they must, like whores, unpack their hearts with words, and fall acursing like very drabs, to paraphrase Hamlet. Yet, they curse not those in power, but those who would curb their grasp, even as they lay claim to being true liberals. And what is more strange, they fall into cursing one another -- beating their thumbs on their typewriters, more often than not the same thumbs from which they suck many of their ideas.

The simple truth is that the press has given up on fact-hunting for the less arduous and frequently more profitable role of interpreting what has gone before and predicting what is to come, in conformity with the Administration's pattern of history and prophesy.

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II

The temptations to abandon reporting in favor of revealing are many. It must be understood that not all reporters are venal or pink. But few survive the siren-singing or pressure of the Administration. The great majority of Washington correspondents earned their place in the Capital by distinguishing themselves as reporters on their hometown papers or in scattered press association bureaus. Most of them come to Washington regarding the show as something like the courthouse gang at home, only bigger. What mysterious alchemy, then, transforms a good reporter into the Washington parrot?

A measure of responsibility can be attributed to the bewilderment and laziness to which we are all heir; but far more important is the grand design of those in power to capture the news columns, leaving the thunder on the "right" to the staid editorial page. This design is advanced by newspapermen who take jobs in Federal service as press relations men. These are aided and abetted by members of the so-called working press, who want no competition. A reporter can make himself highly unpopular in Washington by working, especially by working alone. There is some question whether a Capital columnist is actually more despised by his fellow newspapermen because he breaks much inside news than because of his inaccuracy and axe-grinding.

Naturally enough, the new reporter finds Washington bewildering. He is grateful to find his colleagues, especially his opposition, rushing to lend him every aid instead of offering the cut-throat competition he weathered at home. In no time he finds himself in the position of refusing to scoop his pals, and they remain secure and happy in the knowledge that he is one of them. In time he may work himself into one or another of the "blacksheet gangs" that flourish around newspaper office corridors; these exchange carbon copies of their "think" pieces or minor beats fed by some Administration source.

Or he may find himself invited to join cliques whose members interview one another on national and international developments and pass them off as Washington thinking, with the implication that it is official thought. Finally, if he parlays friendship well, he may reach the dizzy heights of being quoted by his colleagues as "able" or "informed" or "brilliant" or "outstanding" or any of the clichés in the old press room game of backscratching.

III

Long before this, the reporter will have discovered it is far easier to run through the grist of official handouts than to grub for news.

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It is only a turn of phrase that separates the news in a handout from the Administration line. Once a reporter convinces himself that he can bring readers great news from these handouts, he has little or no compunction in lengthening the stride of his dispatches to take in the propaganda. And he does not have to fear being caught as did the cadet cribbers. Time comes when he has nothing to fear but failure to take the Administration line.

The Administration pay-off is pleasant but none the less sinister. If the Administration line is followed assiduously enough, the reporter is invited into friendship with an official. He finds himself a great writer, his writing ability increasing in geometric progression to the progaganda content. It is not difficult to convince a reporter that it isn't the news but the way he writes it that counts. It is not difficult to convince him that he is a true champion of "liberalism". Especially when he finds that those who hew to the line most consistently are acclaimed as journalistic greats in the butcher paper organs of pseudo-liberalism, and when he becomes aware that Pulitzer prizes go to reporters taking handouts from law firms defending loyalty suspects or from a foreign nation.

Administration officials become Tom, Dick or even Harry to the reporter. It is then that the Administration has him in its power. Only one step remains for the reporter to deliver himself up as a captive of the philosophy of those in power, and that is to sell the official an idea. Once he sells a project he binds himself to the Administration, which accepts it more certainly than if he had sealed a blood bond. Intimacy with great names is but a phase of the social trap for the press which has developed in the past twenty years.

IV

Potomac fever is as virulent a disease among the press as it is among politicians. All too easily reporters learn to sing for their suppers and their cocktails. The reporter who does not go along finds his mail heavy with bills and light with invitations. Reporters, who laughed at society pages at home, begin sprinkling their own names in Capital society columns. They send their children to private schools and launch their daughters in debuts.

Informal and select seminars are a method of putting over the Administration line. An official calls a favored reporter and asks him to set up a group for an off-the-record examination or report on a situation. The reporter invites those he expects to invite him in turn to other gatherings. The official gets across his line without identify-

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ing himself with it. The reporter writes his editor that his story comes straight from the mouth of the great official himself, neglecting to mention that anywhere from one to two dozen others got the same pap at the same time. This is the ultimate of the social pay-off.

The pay-off includes invitations to junkets abroad to observe this or that giveaway program, with all expenses paid. The reporter is told he is free to write anything; but if he does not write what Washington likes, invitations do not come in the future. In the same way a reporter who persistently asks pointed questions no longer finds himself called by his first name by officials. He learns not to ask embarrassing questions. But if he behaves well, the Administration will plant questions with him as a special mark of favor.

The final pay-off is, of course, the sell-out -- a permanent or temporary post with the government. Those who go with the government become professed propagandists. Those who serve on leave from their papers spend the rest of their careers on their return to newspaper writing justifying their sell-out. The most complete form of the sell-out is accepting fees on the outside, as is the case with correspondents taking checks from the British Broadcasting Company for telling Britons what they want to hear from America.

In the press services, the pay-off is standard policy. Reporters are instructed to play ball with the Administration to get news. If they do not, they find that important releases are given out when they are not around, which can be fatal when beats are measured by seconds. Press association men are drilled into discarding material unfavorable to the Administration. They call such material "editorializing". Officials who would hesitate to dress down a reporter for a paper have no compunction in complaining against coverage by press services on the ground of "objectivity". If the story isn't loaded for them, officials complain it was not impartial. Press service reporters, as a rule, cannot count on the support of their chiefs, such as is available to newspaper correspondents representing individual papers.

The surrender is not yet complete. There are good men and true in the press corps; and it will always number among its membership a proportion of those who will not compromise the code that has glorified the Fourth Estate. But, the grim note of warning cannot be disregarded. If the press gives up its role of honor guard, then a new and more potent estate will arise, as it now threatens to do, an estate that will turn all the others out of doors -- The Military.

Walter Trohan is chief of the Washington Bureau of the Chicago Tribune. He has served that paper in Washington for 17 years.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. VIII, No. 49

By Frank C. Hanighen December 5, 1951

WHO'S MAN? In Paris, Ambassador Philip Jessup has been chosen as America's man to carry on the negotiations with Russia on the proposed disarmament "peace" plan. When the White House appointed Jessup to the delegation going to Paris, Congress failed to confirm him -- after Stassen and others underlined Jessup's role in the sell-out of China to Communism. But the President sent him anyway, by the devious route of a "recess appointment". Now he appears in this key role.

Was this why the Administration was so determined to send him to Paris?

Diplomats in Washington think it was -- and add that the White House must have known that Jessup was especially acceptable to Soviet Russia. Several noticeable things happened to support this view:

First of all, it was no accident that Vishinsky, who was grossly rude, should have gone out of his way to apologize politely to Jessup on the floor of the Assembly on November 24. Those familiar with the tricks of Soviet diplomacy say that this was no ordinary "courtesy", but that it was "considered". It meant, "We deem Jessup a friend."

Next, on November 26, Jessup talked of the points of divergence between Soviet Russia and the Western States on the matter of the agenda for the proposed disarmament conference, saying that these did not "loom large" in view of the "fundamental differences which have separated the Soviet views from those of the vast majority of the Assembly. . . ."

Finally, a study of the prose of the New York Daily Worker during the week preceding the decision to hold the "peace" conference revealed an unusually courteous treatment of Jessup in Communist reporting of the Paris proceedings.

Then came the announcement that the peace conference would be held, and that Jessup would represent the U.S.

Who's man is Jessup?

* * * * *

FIRE AND CEASE-FIRE: Another pointed question was asked during the past week: who changed the original plan for negotiating a truce, thus producing last week's uproar over cease-fire?

Ludwell Denny, diplomatic editor of the Scripps chain, pointed out that the original plan was to get "armistice terms first, with the truce line to be along the battle front at the time the final agreement was made". The real thorny point was foreseen to be (and this is borne out by the news this week) "inspection and enforcement". Denny remarks: "Therefore there was no justification for fixing a truce line in advance of agreement on conditions making possible any truce." Since that was not taken care of, the infantry cease-fire had to take place last week. For heavy casualties could not be justified to gain ground which might be given back to the enemy if there is a truce in 30 days.

Was it Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk who ordered the military to change the original plan of negotiation of a truce? Rusk not long ago visited Tokyo. He will be remembered as one of the State Department crowd who painted Red China as "liberal"; and a year ago advocated an appeasement policy towards the Chinese Communist Government. (For more on officials who sold out China, see our review of John T. Flynn's current book, below.) Rusk has just resigned.

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E-DAY: General Eisenhower plans to resign his European post on February 21, 1952 and return home to push his candidacy -- according to Defense sources which usually have advance knowledge on such matters.

We have no doubt that the above information is correct and such are the General's intentions. However, all this may not come to pass. Checking up with foreign diplomats here, we gather that announcement of these plans would be received with dismay in Europe. There, people are worried by the developing crisis in rearmament, and count on Eisenhower to set it right. As for opinion in the U.S., it requires no great power of prophecy to say that there would be much criticism of Eisenhower on the ground that he would be deserting his mission when it needs him most.

As a matter of fact, we get a foretaste of such reactions, in a dispatch from Rome to the New York Daily News on December 4. In it Congressman Emmanuel Celler (N.Y., Democrat) is quoted as saying that Republican Congressmen visiting Europe are "doing harm" to rearmament by saying Eisenhower will return home to enter politics. Such remarks, says Celler, are already impairing the morale of Europeans, especially the French and Italians, who set great store on Ike completing his task. Celler adds ominously: "NATO might fall apart if Eisenhower left."

A few more statements like Celler's and it would not be surprising if Ike reconsidered plans for returning home. American opinion might well react adversely to Eisenhower the politician, if Eisenhower the soldier abandoned his post.

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THE NEWS AND EISENHOWER: Everybody knows that New York's delegation to the GOP convention next year will be unanimously for Eisenhower for President. Governor Dewey, it is already assumed, will control that delegation and has pledged it to the General. But like a lot of other things that everybody knows, the story that New York is completely in the bag for Ike is wrong.

On November 26, the Long Island Star-Journal, published in Astoria, Queens County, New York, reported that Frank Kenna, Republican leader of Queens, has pledged Queens delegates to the nomination of Senator Taft. Kenna, Chairman of the Queens County GOP Committee, told the Star-Journal's reporter that he was for Taft, that the Party in Queens was for Taft and that he would oppose any efforts to put over Eisenhower as the Party candidate.

Queens is entitled to 8 delegates to the GOP convention next year, and Kenna made clear that they will not be committed in advance to Eisenhower, Governor Dewey's favorite. Since Kenna will appoint the delegates, the fiction that New York's delegation of 96 will vote as one for the General is punctured.

The Star-Journal, a highly responsible and prosperous daily, a property of the Newhouse chain, seems to think that Dewey's attempt to put over Eisenhower may encounter more trouble, outside Queens. It reminds its readers that Queens is but one of 7 or 8 "trouble spots" in the path of the Governor's efforts in behalf of Ike.

One interesting aspect of this news story is that it has not, so far as we have been able to determine, appeared anywhere in the metropolitan press of the East. No mention of Kenna's statement appeared the next day in the New York Times. Yet the Times in the past week has given no little space to a poll taken by a pro-Eisenhower Congressman, which showed Ike running strongly against Taft.

Nor did the Times or any other metropolitan paper we have examined run an interesting U.P. dispatch from Harrisburg, Pa., of November 28. The United Press polled Republican County chairmen in the state of Pennsylvania and got 27 replies. Taft led the choice with 16 votes, Ike got 3, Warren 1, Dirksen 1 and 6 replies were "uncertain". Pennsylvania is a key state and many papers have sought to give the impression that its junior Senator, Duff, would deliver its delegates to Eisenhower. Yet no discernible publicity was given to this 5 to 1 Taft victory over Eisenhower, as attested in this poll conducted by a big press agency. (Not even Scripps papers -- associated with the U.P. -- gave the story any play.)

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What does this all come to? It indicates that the groundwork has been well laid for a wave of partial press treatment of the nomination fight in favor of the General and suggests that at some point or other a publicity "blitz" -- resembling that which put over Willkie in 1940 -- will be attempted by Ike supporters.

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IN PRAISE OF NATIONALISM: Former President Hoover criticized as "fuzzy-minded" those who claim that nationalism is an evil -- in a speech on December 1 to the Youth Forum conducted by the Daily Mirror in New York. (Reported in the New York Times, December 2, page 32.) Mr. Hoover emphasized that eradication of nationalist feelings "is not the road to the freedom of mankind". Calling nationalism "a powerful and progressive force", Hoover warned that it is the nationalism of the countries behind the Iron Curtain that will "ultimately redeem them from the Communist tyranny of the Kremlin". Finally, the former President gave the following wise reminder: "It is said that vigilance is the price of liberty. It might be added that the seat of liberty must be kept near enough home to keep your eye on it."

We may recall an essay in praise of nationalism in HUMAN EVENTS (March 21, 1951) by George Morgenstern entitled "The Undifferentiated Mass", in which Morgenstern quoted Hoover who said, "I am not ashamed of advocating defense of the United States first" and commented "that Herbert Hoover or any American should have mentioned the necessity of apologizing for being a patriot shows how much our national spirit has changed since the day of Washington's Farewell Address. . . . Now the act of denying allegiance to one's country is sponsored by the Administration presently constituting the Government of the United States."

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POLITICS IN THE ARMY: Among the crowd at the Army-Navy game, a General told a tale which certainly helped solace Army pride. From what we gather, it contained more truth than fiction. It was this: Authorities at West Point sought to arrange a pre-game rally to bolster the poor morale resulting from the dismissal of cadet players in August. It was planned to ask General MacArthur to speak. But the Department of the Army in Washington got wind of this, vetoed the plan and reprimanded the authorities at the Point. So we hear.

RED AND GREEN: The colored circular enclosed herewith is a reminder that if you haven't as yet sent in your Christmas Gift Subscriptions to HUMAN EVENTS, now is the time to do so.

FOOTNOTE ON EDUCATION: (From the hearings of the Internal Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Part 2, page 484.) "Mr. Morris (Committee Counsel): Is it public knowledge that Mr. Finkelstein was a member of the Communist Party, Mr. Canning, if you know?

Mr. Canning: I testified to it previously.

Mr. Morris: In 1940?

Mr. Canning: In 1940.

Mr. Morris: Was he tried by the board of higher education?

Mr. Canning: I don't believe that he came up for trial. I think he resigned, though I would have to check to be sure.

Mr. Morris: Do you know if the same gentleman has a grant from one of the foundations?

Senator Ferguson: What has he to do with this grant from the Ford Foundation?

Mr. Canning: It is a grant apparently to improve the teaching standards of the university." (Emphasis ours.)

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Book Events

While You Slept: Our Tragedy in Asia and Who Made It. By John T. Flynn. New York: Devin-Adair Company. $2.50. Reviewed by Frank Chodorov.

We were talking about the tragic fiasco in Korea. The businessman, who gets all his information from his favorite newspaper, and his opinions from his favorite commentator, admitted that he could not understand how we ever got into the mess. Granted that the Russians are bent on world conquest, could not our top-drawer politicians anticipate and checkmate them? What's wrong in Washington?

The night before, I had read While You Slept, the new book by John T. Flynn. It is only 180 pages, well-written and therefore easily absorbed in one evening. It seemed to me that the author had added little to what has already been revealed about our criminally stupid, if not treasonable, Far Eastern policy. To be sure, his chapters dealing with the capture and use of the American press, radio and movies by Communists and their lovers, for the purpose of shaping a public opinion in favor of a foreign policy most congenial to Russia's aims, bring out many facts not heretofore published; his detailed account of the cooperation among these pen-prostitutes, replete with names and details, is enlightening and startling. Out of the MacArthur hearings he digs up some telling points that have escaped the Fair Deal press, and from the McCarran hearings he adduces corroborative evidence of the plot to dump China into Russia's hands. There is enough new material in the book to make it worthwhile reading even for those who have read the all-too-little that has gotten through the smog of official duplicity and left-wing lies.

At any rate, I told my businessman the story, as I got it from Mr. Flynn's book. That Stalin's Great Design before, during and since World War II never deviated from the Communist Dream of a Red World; that the complete destruction of Germany and Japan were the first steps toward its realization; that expansion toward the East became the next objective, after the absorption of the area in Europe contiguous to Russia, and toward that end he supported the Chinese Communists, even those who are now killing our boys in Korea, against Chiang; that through well-placed agents and sympathizers in our State Department he had created an attitude there not inimical to his plans; that in his negotiations with Mr. Roosevelt he made use of the latter's mania for the Brave New World to further his own ends; that his agents effectively traduced highly placed men, like Morgenthau, Wallace and Marshall, into attitudes favorable to his program; all the while, his literary admirers, if not his stooges, did their best to hide his design from public view.

The businessman was incredulous. He found it hard to believe that (1) sympathizers with, if not agents of, a foreign and hostile country could worm their way into our policy-making machinery; (2) that top-flight political figures were so stupid and naive as to become dupes of such a clique; (3) that the American press could be seduced by a pro-Soviet gang. And yet, he said, the Chinese debacle and the Korean affair indicate that something was wrong with our political setup, and he decided it was high time that he look into the matter; he would read Mr. Flynn's book forthwith.

That reaction gave me pause; only a comparatively small segment of the American public have read even the little that has been published on the subject. There is need for much iteration and reiteration before the effects of pro-Soviet propaganda these past ten years will have been overcome. It has to be in books, for the periodicals field is still practically closed to exposure of the Roosevelt myth.

Mr. Flynn has done the country a service. He has not only brought the story of our crazy Far Eastern policy up to date, he has put it into the compact form that will attract and impress even the businessman. Nor has he neglected to bolster his arguments with evidence, in the form of direct quotations and copious notes.

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